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RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 1144

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SENSITIVE
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DEPT FOR AF/W (D. BANKS AND E. PLUMB)
PARIS FOR D'ELIA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KCOR](#) [KMCA](#) [BN](#)

SUBJECT: BENIN: PRESIDENT YAYI FIRES FOUR SENIOR OFFICERS OVER
CUSTOMS FRAUD SCANDAL

REF: A) COTONOU 477; B) COTONOU 512

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: President Yayi dismissed four customs officials after an investigation conducted by the State Audit Office (IGE) revealed their involvement in a case of customs fraud. An announcement from the office of the President informed the public of the dismissal of the four officials. END SUMMARY.

12. (U) In an announcement delivered the evening of August 13, President Yayi dismissed Colonel Charles Adekambi, the Director of the Benin Customs, Colonel Marcellin Zannou, the Chief of the Cotonou Port Brigade, and Mr. Emmanuel Ogouchina and Mr. Honor Akakpo, respectively Customs Collector and Chief Brigadier of the Customs office located at Porga, on the Benin-Burkina Faso border. A report of the August 13 extraordinary Council of Ministers confirmed the information, giving more details on the case. The four customs officials were accused of colluding with a well-known Beninese businessman and owner of the Forwarding Agent COBETRAC, Mr. Daouda Lawal, to help him evade customs duties through fraudulent practices. Fifteen fully loaded trucks in transit at the Cotonou seaport, bound for Burkina Faso, were found empty at the border of Porga, as the goods were apparently illegally unloaded and sold without having been cleared through customs. (NOTE: This scheme is known to be widespread in the customs administration and contributes to the illicit enrichment of customs officials and businessmen. END OF NOTE)

13. (SBU) The Government also decided to withdraw Mr. Daouda Lawal's license which authorized him to operate as a Forwarding Agent and announced that he would face fines for violating customs regulations. The GOB also announced that an investigation of his activities during the last three years would be carried out. New measures to increase transparency in the customs administration were also announced.

14. (SBU) Colonel Marcellin Zannou, the dismissed Chief of the Port Brigade, was the Spokesperson of the Customs Bureau and a strong political supporter of President Yayi. He ran in the March 2007 legislative elections and was elected National Assembly Deputy under the umbrella of Yayi's FCBE. He then resigned his seat in favor of his alternate, preferring to keep his former position at the Cotonou Port. Colonel Charles Adekambi served as Director of the Port of Cotonou under Kerekou's former regime and was later dismissed by him for reasons that are unclear. President Yayi reinstated Adekambi when he came in power.

(SBU) COMMENT: Some critics have been claiming that, despite President Yayi's highly visible campaign against corruption, some of his close collaborators are not above suspicion. By dismissing the Chief of the Port Brigade, President Yayi demonstrated that his anti-corruption crusade will not spare anyone, regardless of

political connections, if that person is found guilty of any economic crime. The Council of Minister's decision, like President Yayi's anti-corruption campaign in general, appears to be popular in the press and among the general public. END COMMENT.

LAUTERBACH